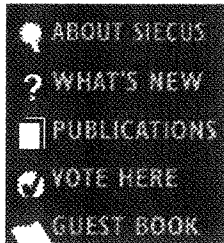


Fact Sheets



Sexual Orientation and Identity

SIECUS believes that an individual's sexual orientation--whether bisexual, homosexual, or heterosexual--is an essential part of sexual health and personality. SIECUS strongly supports the right of each individual to accept, acknowledge, and live in accordance with his or her orientation. SIECUS advocates laws guaranteeing civil rights and protection to all people, and deplores all forms of prejudice and discrimination against people based on sexual orientation.

Recent public debates on homosexuality have been distorted by homophobia, misinformation, and stereotypes about sexual orientation and identity. This fact sheet has been prepared by SIECUS staff to provide current, accurate facts to inform a more intelligent debate.

DEFINITIONS OF SEXUALITY

* Sexual orientation is one's erotic, romantic, and affectional attraction to the same gender (sex), to the opposite gender (sex), or both.

* Sexual identity is an inner-sense of oneself as a sexual being, including how one identifies in terms of gender and sexual orientation.

* Sexual preference is a term once used to describe sexual orientation--bisexuality, homosexuality and heterosexuality--which is now outdated because sexual orientation is no longer commonly considered to be one's conscious individual preference or choice, but is instead thought to be formed by a complicated network of social, cultural, biological, economic, and political factors.

* Homophobia is the irrational hatred and fear of lesbian and gay people that is produced by institutionalized biases in a society or culture.

* Several studies indicate that exposure to truthful information about lesbians and gay men often leads to a reduction in homophobia.¹

* Heterosexism is the institutional and societal reinforcement of heterosexuality as the privileged and powerful norm.

* Neither the term heterosexuality nor the term homosexuality existed

before 1890.

ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

* No single scientific theory about what causes sexual orientation has been suitably substantiated. Studies to associate sexual orientation exclusively with genetic, hormonal, and environmental factors have so far been inconclusive.²

* Many interventions aimed at changing the sexual orientation of lesbians and gay men have succeeded only in reducing sexual behavior and self-esteem rather than in creating or increasing attractions to the other gender.³

* It is considered ethically questionable by the professional psychological community to seek to alter through therapy a trait that is not a disorder and is extremely important to individual identity and sexual health.⁴

* The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of disorders in 1973.

* A common false allegation leveled against many gay men and lesbians is that they are child-molesters. In fact, 95% of all reported incidents of child sexual abuse are committed by heterosexual men.⁵

CIVIL LIBERTIES & DISCRIMINATION

* Only nine states in the U.S. have legislation protecting lesbian and gay people against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

* In 1992, Colorado voters approved a constitutional amendment prohibiting civil rights protection on the basis of sexual orientation, a measure which effectively invalidated the laws in several Colorado cities that did extend equal rights to lesbian and gay citizens.

* Seven states have laws banning the practice of certain sexual acts between adults of the same gender.⁶

* Sixteen other states plus the District of Columbia have laws banning the practice of certain sexual acts by homosexual and heterosexual couples.⁷

* Lesbians and gay men are the most frequent victims of hate crimes and are at least seven times more likely to be crime victims than heterosexual people.⁸

* At least 75% of crimes against lesbians and gay men are not reported to anyone.⁹

* In a 1991 study of five metropolitan areas including Boston, Chicago,

* According to Yankelovich Partners, Inc. study, 57% of people polled thought that gay men and lesbians should not be banned from the military.¹⁹

HETEROSEXUAL MEN IN THE MILITARY

* As many as 50 female Navy and Marine personnel were sexually assaulted in public by a dozen male officers at a convention of the Tailhook Association, an official military gathering.

* Two senior Navy admirals were forced into early retirement and one was reassigned when it was discovered that they had deliberately undermined the initial investigation of the Tailhook assaults to protect fellow Navy officers from embarrassment and criminal charges. In addition, the Navy Secretary, H. Lawrence Garrett, resigned his position.

* Sexual harassment in the military is prohibited and regulated by codes of conduct.

* The Pentagon has not raised efforts to investigate or discharge male sexual harassers. The Pentagon has not made public the number and cost of male military personnel who are yearly discharged for sexual assault or harassment of female military personnel.

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January 14, 1993; (Copies can be obtained by writing to 2033 M Street, NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 2003)



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